

Handout #5: Evaluation Methods

Overview of Methods to Collect Information (by Carter McNamara, Ph.D.; last revision: February 16, 1998)

Evaluation Type	Evaluation Goal	Specific Questions	Activities
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This evaluation involves judging the activities or strategies of your project. This often involves looking at what has been done, who has been reached, and the quality of the activities. It involves seeking answers to questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the program reached the appropriate people? Are all the program activities progressing as planned? If not, why? Were any changes made to the intended activities? If so, why? Are materials, information, and presentations of good quality? Are the participants and other key people satisfied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of staff performance Review of program documents Program review Documentation review Observation.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This evaluation involves judging the extent to which your program has had an immediate effect on the knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral changes of the target population. It measures whether you have met these objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What progress has been made toward achieving the goal? To what extent has the program met its objectives? How effective has the program been at producing changes? Are there any factors outside of the program that have contributed to (or prevented) the desired change? Has the program resulted in any unintended change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys.
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This evaluation will determine whether and how well the long-term program goals have been achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What progress has been made toward achieving the goals? To what extent has the program met its objectives? How effective has the program been at producing changes? Are there any factors outside the program that have contributed to or prevented the desired change? Has the program resulted in any unintended change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys.
Formative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically carried out during the development or improvement of a program to identify problems with implementation and efficacy. Results are used to revise intervention components, data collection instruments, or procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we improve the intervention/program? Have the right questions been asked on the survey? Was sufficient evidence-based information provided to promote knowledge, attitude, or a change in behavior? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group Pilot test an intervention Semi-structured interviews.

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, Surveys, Checklists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to quickly and/or easily get a lot of information from people in a nonthreatening way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can complete anonymously Inexpensive to administer Easy to compare and analyze Can administer to many people Can get a lot of data Many sample questionnaires already exist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Might not get useful feedback Wording can bias client's responses Are impersonal May need sampling expert for surveys Does not get the full story.
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences or to learn more about their answers to questionnaires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a full range and depth of information Develop a relationship with client Can be flexible with the client. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can take a significant amount of time Can be hard to analyze and compare Can be costly Interviewer can bias client's responses.
Documentation review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to obtain an impression of how a program operates without interrupting the program through a review of applications, finances, memos, and minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide comprehensive and historical information Does not interrupt program or client's routine in program Information already exists Few biases about information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often takes much time Information may be incomplete Need to be quite clear about what data are needed Not a flexible means to get data; data are restricted to what already exists.
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can view operations of a program as they are actually occurring Can adapt to events as they occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors Can be complex to categorize observations Can influence behaviors of program participants Can be expensive.
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore a topic in depth through group discussion (e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints) Useful in evaluation and marketing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quickly and reliably get common impressions Can be an efficient way to get a greater range and depth of information in a short time Can convey key information about programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be hard to analyze responses Need good facilitator for safety and closure Difficult to schedule.

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully describe a client's experiences in a program Allow for the conduct of a comprehensive examination through cross-comparison of cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully describe a client's experience in a program, including input, process, and results Powerful way of portraying the program to outsiders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be time consuming to collect, organize, and describe Represent depth of information, rather than breadth.